

The Ramblings Of An Old Man

{Edition 4

Not all of the facts herein might be in order or even true. To any authority types that read this, please note this is all a work of fiction based on several dreams I had. I believe the dreams to be brought on by late night gorging of mustard. Many people may be upset that I talk about myself in the third or even fourth person. To anyone who is very, very upset with Lumsie, I urge you to avoid killing any elves in retaliation. Please don't go and kill a random elf to show your displeasure as it would hurt me so very, very much. Really. Everything in here is meant for entertainment purposes only. I consider it a small way to give back to the community. And etcetera.

To anyone who says "This should be written this way instead" I say "If you want to edit the book for free let me know."

I would like to dedicate this book to all of the people who listen to my stories. I hope that you have been entertained. I know that there is a tendency to forget things (especially when you are addicted to forget it wells) as time passes. Sadly, I've forgotten a lot more stories that I've experienced than what is here. If you want to submit stories of your experiences with Lumsie (or because of Lumsie), please get into contact with me.

I'd like to also dedicate this book to new adventurers everywhere. It has been a pleasure to serve you over the years.

I'd also like to dedicate this book to my mom and dad. I love you both very much.

I'd also like to dedicate this book to my fellow Dragon Mages - the Council (not the Liches Council) - the Dragon Mage's Council), Hoyle, Constantine and others who have helped me on my way.

About where I come from:

FH is a civilized place where undead rule. Chaos and necromancy are both legal and expected. Failure for an earth caster to cast these things can lead to fining and social ostracism. FH is a place where the blackened, split open ground is barely farmable yet a civilization has existed for thousands of years - and will continue to exist for thousands more. FH has taken over many lands and continues to conquer many more. The fresh conquering of lands allows for an inflow of things that are needed on an ongoing basis - slaves, luxury goods and general swag. In FH, everything is owned by the King. Hence, it is a FH King Chair, a FH King Oil Flask, etc. The university is very expensive there and is well known as FH King U. Gooooo Pods! See Appendix I of this book for some FH King Facts and Figures!

The Bazaar: Nearly anything is available there. Rare, stolen, cursed, it has it all.

Places of FH King note:

The FH King Capital City

Necanohos is a bone white city whose cracked spires point accusingly at the sky. Broken, dusty white homes lay tumbled atop each other in a chaos reminiscent of a child's forgotten building blocks. The city has several concentric walls built around a hill. As one climbs the hill, one leaves behind the putrid decay of the poor.



The Assassins Guilds of FA

There is a public assassin's guild although the interior might be mistaken for a bank or other well-heeled organization. The people you talk to are cordial, polite and well spoken. They looked pained if you use words like 'murder' or 'assassinate'. They prefer phrases that are discrete. Sometimes, the people you meet with are senior assassins who have retired, sometimes not. These people are not the people who do the actual killing. They are intermediaries who go through others. All the assassin ever sees is an anonymous note and a bag of cash. From what I understand, they are happy to pay their assassins up front. If the assassin does not wish the assignment for whatever reason, they return the money and note to a place known to them. Should they keep the money and note but fail to complete the mission, they are made an example of. Discretion is the bylaw of the Assassin's guild. No organization could have survived for a millennia if it was not efficient. It is rumored that they can dispose even of monarchs. For this reason, the FA King Crown Prince is always made head of the organization as an honorary position. I do not know why. I do know that the FA King Assassins guild provides some security to the ruler and his line. They never directly work against the FA King although they have been known to do so in subtle ways - assigning new assassins for protection, etc.

There are three main types of assassins within the assassins' guild. The lowest is the Yellow. They are known to make traps from which there is no escape to blow up their target. They might be a long ways away when the explosives go off. Because of their propensity to be a distance away when the trap is sprung, they are considered 'chicken' by the other assassins. Hence, the name 'Yellow'. The next assassin grade up is the 'Red'. They are the most common sort of assassin out there. Cold, quick, methodical. These are the average assassins. The last sort of assassin is the 'Black Velvet Glove'. They are chosen from the crème of the crop. Many trials and tests are required to be not just passed (i.e. survive) but aced in order to be considered for the BVG. Needless to say, these assassins can cost quite a bit more than your average assassin. Among their main weapons is fear. Their victim will find a black velvet glove with the victims' initials on it. The victim then knows

that within the next couple of minutes they are going to die. Or perhaps the next two years. It is widely reputed that nobody has ever escaped the resurrection circle when a BYG is involved.

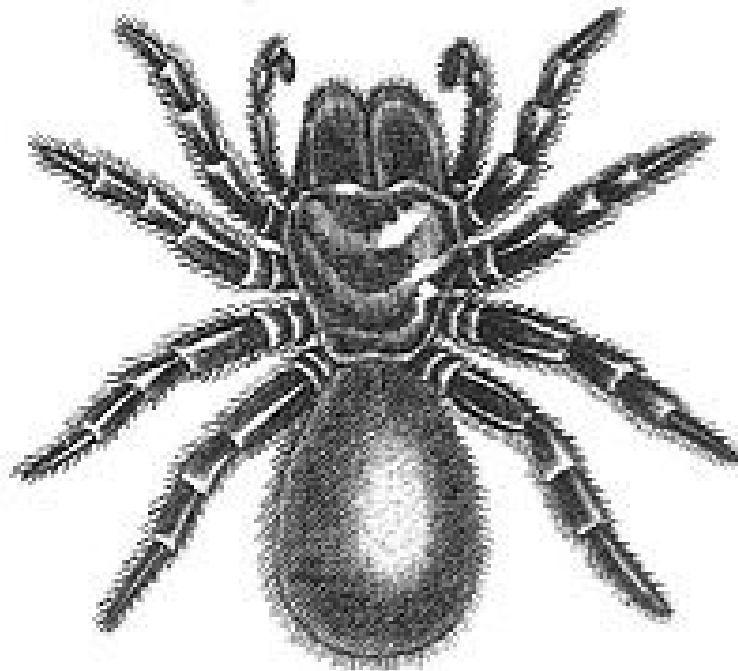


FIGURE 486. Miscellaneous Krisses. 1. Sumatra(?). Kingfisher hilt. Scabbard covered with silver. 2. Similar to no. 1. 3. Java. An embossed silver ornament across the top of the scabbard. 4. Black wood hilt and scabbard. A shell on the pommel and the scabbard covered with embossed silver. 5. Waved pamir blade 12.75 inches long. Hilt of black wood, an elephant(?) set in embossed brass. One piece scabbard. 6. Straight pamir blade. 7. Very heavy blade of unusual shape carved with a snake. Narrow topped, one piece scabbard. 8. Very old waved blade 11 inches long, wood hilt. 9. Java. Hilt, a bird painted red, green and brown. 10. Java. Scabbard painted in a diaper pattern in red and green. 11. The hilt of no. 1. Black wood set in silver. 12. Celebes. Much waved blade finely inlaid with gold. Very heavy plain scabbard. 13. The hilt of no. 8. A much worn figure of a warrior with a sword and round shield. 14. Java. Blade inlaid with pamir in rectangular patches. 15. Java. Painted scabbard. 16. Java. Painted scabbard with a procession of warriors on the top. 17. Bali. Painted scabbard, a fight between a dragon-headed snake and two men. 18. Madura. Blade watered with pamir in unusually large patches. 19. The hilt of no. 9. 20. Java. Waved blade inlaid with gold, crystal hilt. Scabbard covered with silver embossed and filigree. 21. Bali. Waved blade with very brilliant pamir. Hilt a gilded figure set with pink stones. 22. Straight pamir blade, wood hilt. Scabbard covered with embossed silver plated copper. 23. Java. Blade carved with a serpent and an elephant's head on each edge. 24.

The FA King Silk Caverns

These are inhabited by intelligent (well, mostly) giant spiders. They trade silk for food, slaves and luxury items. Their silk is highly prized. There are a couple of things of note in the silk caverns. First, items which are considered 'highly dangerous' are often placed into the vaults there. These vaults, while on the spider's property are still considered the property of the FA King. It is ill advised to steal FA King items from the vaults and wear them into the presence of the FA King. Yes, this has actually happened before. Second, it is rumored that the web is so large that at parts it reaches into other worlds. Most scholars consider this a load of goblin dung but admit that the majority of the FA King Great Web is unmapped. There is also, I feel, some huge secret within the FA King Silk Caverns that the spider people will not speak of. Some do not even know it. I've no idea what the FA it is. I will be publishing a bit on these FA King Spiders in the future as traveling with several is giving me an opportunity to study them.

I will be collecting more information on the Spider People and adding it to a book sometime in the future.



My parents:

Saddam Nusbah

Saddam is a very powerful Liche. His main ambition in life was to become the King of FA, also known as the FA King. He wanted the power that Dragon Magic would bestow him. Under the FA King is the Council of Liches - a group of Liches usually 5 to 30 in number (it varies widely) who plot and scheme on each other and plot to take the throne. They prefer to act indirectly against each other. They advise the FA King on various matters and handle various offices within the FA King Bureaucracy. The liches often plot to take an office from another liche, etc. Due to the constant squabbling, surprisingly few coup attempts go on, roughly one per few decades.

Yixian Nusbah

Yixian is the wife of Saddam. She is haughty, imperial, cunning and a powerful. Her greatest weakness is her over confidence. She's been in Xilbar a few times, working on cutting deals with various adventurers. I've heard that she recently was killed by the same double crossing adventurers there. That seemed to give her a bit more respect for the barbaric adventurers. I'm not sure if she's left FA since. I hope she brings me my cake on my next birthday but with so many Lumsies it would be a rare thing.

Birth/creation/purpose/childhood.

When Saddam Nusbah was on the Council, he plotted to gain enough power to take the FA King Throne. The scheme he hatched up was to create a being likely to become dragon mage and then possess himself into it. Long he labored in his alchemical laboratory until he at last created the Lumsie series. His plan was to create several in hopes one would become a Dragon Mage. Being a careful man, he created thousands of Lumsies.

In order to be able to tell them apart (all Lumsies look alike), he bred into them a question with an answer. When asked the question correctly, the Lumsie would have to immediately relate their number. Your humble narrator is Lumsie #9. It is fortunate that he did this as Virian would take great delight in dressing all of the Lumsie's exactly the same. Fortunately, after leaving the nest, they rebelled against this. They dress radically different although all Lumsie's wear hats. It is unknown why although it is suspected that they have a fear of having their brain freeze.

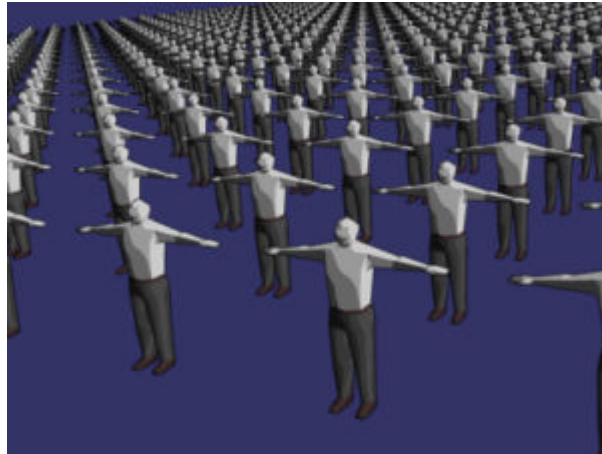
Sadly, the first batches (among which your humble narrator is part) were dubbed 'too insane' and probably not worth bothering about. The Lumsie's were made to have various powers Saddam deemed useful, including the ability to travel through space and time, potential for developing Dragon Magic and the ability to comfortably house spirits other than the one within the body. Unfortunately, the power to house spirits made the Lumsie's 'low rent housing for the wayward spirit.' Hundreds of the spirits sought refuge within Lumsies. In frustration, Saddam gave the Lumsies as a gift to his wife. He hoped that they would provide a convenient on going source of blood for his vampiric wife. She would make her rounds to all of the Lumsie children at night with a basket of sugar cookies. She would drain a decent amount of blood from each then ram a sugar cookie into their mouth. Near passing out, they would feebly suck on or choke the cookie down before sleeping.

Later batches of Lumsie's were cross bred with various entities, monsters, etc in hopes of creating one that could do Dragon Magic. Many of these abominations died in the laboratory, others loosed onto various worlds. Their disposition is unknown. The later batches (after about Lumsie 2000) are not really considered 'Lumsies' at all. Many are even named differently.

The Council is still part of the 'ruling class' on FA, the Lumsie's were educated by private tutors, etc.

If they were insolent, the Lumsie's were placed into burlap bags and beaten with rakes; pretty standard stuff.

After a few years of playing mother to hundreds of Lumsies, Vivian got sick of the whole lot and told them it was time for them to leave home. The Lumsies had the power to walk through shadow from plane to plane - Vivian told them to go and test out that power.



Lumsie - The Early Years

Lumsie and the Gypsies

When placed into a group of beings that are all the same, I tend to become more and more like them. At the outset of my travels, I fell in with (tagged along with) a group of Gypsies. After traveling with them for a few weeks, I was speaking Rom, thinking Rom, feeling Rom. During one night as the Gypsies sat around the campfire they passed around a cup. Everyone inhaled as Lumsie grabbed it, gulped some of the drink and passed it on. Unknown to Lumsie, this was The Cup. The cup that, if drank from by a non-gypsy caused them to die. Much to the astonishment (and some unkind wags say the chagrin of) the gypsies, Lumsie lived. Lumsie the Gypsy was born! Not long after that, the entire encampment of gypsies disappeared. Some say they were eaten by shadows, some say they fell through a rift between worlds. I say the bloody wankers snuck off during the night.

Wandering through time and space, Lumsie eventually came to a forest. It seemed to him to be a huge forest though in reality Lumsie had stumbled into the Wandering Forest. This was no ordinary forest but a forest completely comprised of Tree Ents. It was here that Lumsie found (was led to?) a baby in the forest. Lumsie looked at the tree ("Oak Tree") then slowly down to the baby ("Fallen?"). Hence the baby was named, Oak Tree Fallen.

It is not known when Lumsie first came to Tyrra, simply because I don't know what year it is. If, during the time of this writing, it is 605, then I estimate that I started adventuring in 594 or 595.

Oak Grew into a mighty adventurer. Many say he far surpassed his father in adventuring skills. It was thought that, in time, he would become a mighty adventurer. He ranged far and wide over Tyrra. He had a run in with a Gorbe and she bore a large litter of Kittens. I can't remember all of the names of them but they were all adventurers. They included such memorable names as 'Cub 4', 'Undead to Me', etc. I

believe Cub 4 even had a cub named '4.1 zoo'. The grandchildren were grown up and became old enough to begin plotting to kill their father, Oak. Then, inexplicably, Oak went insane and disappeared. It is widely believed that he has retired from adventuring and lives in seclusion. It is hoped one day that he will come back to adventuring but it is dubious.

How Lumsie Saved The Entire Gypsy Race

Sometime during my adventures, a very unwise Gypsy placed a curse upon Silvas Firestar. He was very upset with the Gypsy but wasn't able to kill them immediately. The gypsy escaped and failed to come back into town. Silvas demanded that I remove the curse. Naturally, I refused. Silvas informed me of his next actions. I removed the curse.

Naturally, I had to appear before the Banditeer whom I did not know and had not seen before. There was many mutterings of possible 'marahim'. I stood fast. The council of twelve roared and debated with each other until they were almost at their decision. Before rendering their final decision, it was decided to ask me for my side of the story. I did something unusual and asked to call forth one, and only one, gaje witness. After some muttering, it was agreed. Silvas Firestar graciously agreed to be questioned in front of the council. I asked him "What did you say you would do if I did not remove the curse?" He said "I would kill every gypsy on Tyrra." I then turned to the Banditeer. "Is there anyone here who doubts his sincerity?" No, they agreed he was very sincere. In fact, he mentioned he was thinking of killing all of them very soon just for bothering him. "Is there anyone," I asked, "Who believes he cannot kill every gypsy on Tyrra?" Again, it was agreed that he had more than sufficient power to do this alone if he desired. Silvas wandered off. The council did more debating. At last, it was decided that I, Lumsie, had wisely saved the entire gypsy race from extinction and that they further supported my decision to become a human. He who wins the world must first lose it.

Lumsie's First adventure

Lumsie had never been to a greater hive of scam and villainy since leaving FH as I did when I arrived in Corvos. As a young, tender adventurer I tended to die a lot. I needed many, many life spells per day to not resurrect, to the tune of about a hundred. Fortunately, this was back in the days before the level of magic took a mighty dip. It was a dark spooky evening, not particularly unlike any other dark spooky evening that I'd experienced. I did spy with my little eye, something black. It flitted from tree to tree. When it got closer, I could tell that it was a human shape wrapped in a cloak. The person held the cloak with their left arm crooked around their mouth, in classic vampire pose. It flitted to a closer tree to me and peered at me. Then, I did something completely unexpected.

I waved.

This confused the vampire.

Eventually, it came over to me and we talked. The vampire called itself 'C' and it was irritated. Apparently, evil adventuring types had rolled into his crypt and robbed him. I told him that was just not right. It was, I explained, my first day adventuring and I had been told by other adventurers that if I had anything senior adventurers wanted, they would roll into my home and rob me too. The vampire sympathized. After discussing his hobby of collecting antiques for a bit, 'C' decided that he liked me and would send minions to guard me. I assured him that wouldn't be necessary but he pointed out that there were other dangers in the woods - goblins, rival vampires and evil adventurers. I accepted his offer.

A male and a female vampire showed up later, displeased with their instructions to guard me. The male vampire said testily to me, "Do you need anything?"

Remembering a phrase I had heard earlier in the day, I said "Boat me up!"

Quivering with rage, he proceeded to cast many spells on me. He nearly exploded when I pointed out he had forgotten a poison shield.

But I got one.

When you meet new friends, what do you do? Why you introduce them to your old friends so that you can see if they can all get along and be happy.

So I took the vampires around to introduce them to my new friends.

I found my son at a cabin but he was unable to leave the ward to greet my new friends as he was in the middle of casting rituals. I couldn't find some of my other friends but we did get lucky and stumble across The Trent out in the town near a building.

The vampires were very interested to talk to The Trent. In those days, you had to stare into a vampire's eyes for ten seconds in order to be 'vampire charmed'. When you were vampire charmed, you became a puppet of the vampire. Apparently, The Trent was familiar with this as he began to play with the vampire, staring deeply into the vampires eyes for periods of five seconds before scanning the woods, coughing into his hand, looking through his pouch, etc. This made the vampires very upset.

Eventually, it became clear that The Trent wanted to leave. I have no idea how he wanted to get out of there as we were against a wall with no windows nor doors. No vegetation or deep shadows were within at least thirty feet. No where to hide. But I did what I could.

"What was that?" I said, snapping my head around toward the bush.

"What?" The vampires snapped their heads over then back to where The Trent had been.

He was gone.

To this day, I don't have a clue how.

"Where is he?" Hissed the vampires.

"Who?" I said.

"I hate him so much!" Growled the male vampire. The female vampire agreed that this was their worst assignment ever.

Fortunately, "C" chose that moment to show up. With a glance he calmed the two vampires and said that he had located one of the people who had the indelicacy to raid his crypt. It turned out to be another friend I had just made that day named Bandista. He was a seven foot tall Gorbe. Since he was my friend, I managed to talk "C" into just turning him into a vampire instead of killing him.

In these days, few cabins had wards. Only the celestial guild and healers guild had circles. It was a simple matter for the vampires to walk in, grab him and walk out. After they had turned him into a vampire, I tried to be helpful by offering him a nice vein in my arm to suck on for a bit. I knew he would be hungry. He was, unfortunately, inconsolable. I heard later that he went and saw a dawn. Fortunately, he resurrected. I'm not sure where he is these days, but I had heard he'd moved down to Baddenia a few years ago.

Don Armani and Informal Magic

In the land of Barnabus, long ago, the Fae existed in strength. They were into racketeering, loan sharking, numbers running, etc. Their leader was a Fae (I don't honestly recall if he was a leprechaun or merely in charge of them) named 'Don Armani'. He had large wings and wore a pinstripe business suit. He was 'The Godfather'. A group of adventurers (including your humble narrator) did him a 'little favor'. He then went around to the individual members of the group asking 'What do you want?' The adventurers came up with fairly standard stuff - gold, components, magic items, etc. At last, he came to Lumsie who gave him an unexpected answer. "I wanna be your boy - I want you to be my Fairy Godfather." "Done!" he said with gusto. Many adventurers tried to change what they had asked for but were admonished with "Shaddap 'For a breaka you face!"

Thus Lumsie established good relations with the Fae (Sellie - the Unseelie are a bunch of jamooks) and Don Armani. It came to pass that after a time, Lumsie needed to contact his Fairy Godfather. He decided to try Something New. He assembled together a pot full of edible chocolate gold, a guy wearing a green tabard (in case we needed a Victim), The Gift and The Town. He had the town sing certain sounds over and over: "Dump dump dada dump, dump dump dada dump..." I then sang forth the ancient words:

"Goons and thugs,
Filling some creep with slugs.
Broads and drugs,
Hideouts where bosses meet-
Can you tell me how to get,
How to get to Mafia street?"

As the town laughed mightily, a leprechaun appeared and eyed the pot of gold. I cut a deal with him that if he took The Gift to Don Armani, he could have the whole pot of gold. The leprechaun accepted. Don Armani received the note and came back to Tyrra smoking the cigar. This was

the first time I had ever done Informal Magic. This is significant as it later led to Lumste having Dragon Magic.



The Finger

This story developed over two years or a bit longer. One day, Lumsie's right pointer finger started talking. It said horrible things to people and was generally unpleasant. It was noticed that any time Lumsie was given a sharp object, he would attempt to kill himself, hack off limbs, etc. Rather than wondering why, it was decided to keep sharp objects away from Lumsie - who seemed interested in getting hold of them. The talking Finger continued talking for months until one day someone attempted to kill it and it resisted. This caused some consternation but adventurers have the ability to overlook the bizarre, especially when it deals with Lumsie. Later, the Finger grew, turned green and developed small arms that could actually hold mystical energy. People noticed that it would occasionally cast spells. This, too, went ignored. It was considered more of an oddity than a threat. Eventually, things went Wrong.

According to witnesses, small group of ogres had captured an unconscious Lumsie (me). They were taking him back for whatever horrible reason they had when one of the observing adventurers came up with a Bad Idea. "Hey - we'll give you a gold to cut off his right pointer finger!" The adventurers pointed up the gold, the ogres sawed off the finger. Suddenly, there was a huge flash of light and a liche erupted from the severed finger with a huge Death Blossom of mystical energy. Rapid fire 'arcane deaths' soon cleared the field of adventurers and ogres alike. The liche then attempted to go back into the finger.

Needless to say, this spooked the adventurers a bit - especially now that Lumsie sported a black right pointer finger. It grew throughout the day until it became larger than a Buldger then exploded. The liche was furious. He killed Lumsie, turned him into undead and forced him to work the fields. He threw around a few more 'arcane deaths' then he rifted off. Some crafty adventurer discovered the ruined remains of the Black Finger and took it to a celestial circle to identify it. It turned out to be a singular void. Last I'd heard, it had been taken to some other land and used in a ritual to make an evil artifact. It turned out that the

liche was actually Lumsie's father. Having gotten word about Lumsie's success with informal magic, he decided to 'come along for the ride'. It turned out that Lumsie's subconscious desire to chop off limbs was merely his attempting to get rid of the liche.



The Ascent of Nusbah

Fortunately for Lumsie, Saddam Nusbah somehow ascended the throne of FA to become the FA King. Yes, this made Lumsie a "Fa King Son of a Liche". The FA King visited Barnacus once. "I call upon the power of the FA King to obliterate your spirit" was a saying he had that I'm sure won't be missed.

At this time, the FA King Royal Line began to come into question. Since the Lumsie's were the children of Nusbah they were considered in line for the crown. Since they were made in batches, it was more problematic than twins. With a twin, the commonly accepted practice was to attempt to kill him. The spirited yet humble nurse would then take the babe off to a place of safety. She would then usually be killed by her pursuers before being able to be questioned. It was then generally assumed that the babe would either die from exposure or otherwise just 'go away'. The babe would grow into manhood, undergo many harrowing adventures and go challenge his evil, enthroned brother. Being Good, he would not kill said brother but rather imprison him for his evil deeds and rule with a just hand.

In FA it's just not like that.

Death by assassination (regicide) is considered 'death by natural causes' in FA. Nurses may be slain by the household in order to break the whole cycle.

With the Lumsie's, the problem of ascension was especially tricky since there were a couple thousand Lumsies.

Fortunately, a way is always found.

Several of the Lumsies were on a different plane of existence, observing a mystical play. Suddenly, a phrase from this play leapt out at them. "There can be only one!" This became the Lumsies rallying cry. Several swords were drawn and much blood was shed in that theater.

As the patrons fled for their lives, the Lumsies had found a new purpose. The survivors fled to spread the word and take the heads of other Lumsies.

To this date, I have slain (alone or with help) approximately twenty one Lumsies while adventuring at market days. In the end, there can be only one.

Currently, that one is me. All of the other Lumsies are either dead or fled. I have been named Crown Prince of FA (aka FA King Crown Prince) by my father and ratified by the Council of Liches. There are a number of reasons why Lumsie #9 was considered an ideal choice.

First, he is not considered competent enough to take on the FA King, so Saddam is happy.

Second, he is generally absent from, and seems to have little interest in FA. So the council is happy. It is generally assumed that were Saddam to fall down a shaft and land on a lot of crossbow bolts that Lumsie #9 would have no further interest in the FA King Throne. So, the council of Liches is happy.

Third, according to Lumsie, he has taken over the planet of Tyrna. This is handy because it allows some of the FA King Armies to do something other than take over yet another world. It is especially handy because, as the FA King Governor of Tyrna Lumsie #9 finds a reason to be gone a lot. It seems that every time they elect someone as an ambassador, they leave the country! So, the general populace supports Lumsie #9 being the FA King Crown Prince. Having not executed much of the population of FA, they are even considering adding 'The Benevolent' to his title.

The Dragons

Somewhere in this time, Lumsie met up with the Dragons. Some people incorrectly called them Drake Scavengers but they called themselves Dragons and Lumsie believes they are correct. Though I don't have the names of all of the dragons, the ones that I remember include: Tempest: He was the leader of the pack and later became a bronze dragon. I believe he was a templar. He has not been seen in these lands to these many years. Blizzard: Nickname: Blizzard the Lizard Wizard. He is a celestial caster and still occasionally travels with yours truly. He is a white dragon who at one time was running around eating wards and circles of power. He is very depressed at the dispersion of the Great Pack. Tsunami: Use to be a big blue dragon. Heard that he became a green dragon out in Analar (out West). If this is true it is a sad loss for the rest of dragon kind. Tobar Goatfucker: I think he was a black dragon. I think he is also out West but I've heard that he is back to being a tri-sexual mystic wood elf. Cedrick Augustine: I forget what his dragon name was. He was a dragon while the pack was together and stopped being one when the Great Pack disbanded. He also (much like Oak) went insane and stopped adventuring. During these times, Lumsie hung out with the Dragons. He was dubbed a 'dragon chew toy'. Since he was a Dragon Mage, they decided it would be good to have him with them. These were happy days for all concerned as the Dragons built a fighting force of extraordinary magnitude, forged in the tradition of our ancestors. They have my gratitude.

The Last Great March of the Dragons

I think that it was out in Galarast that the Dragons headed to hunt. I think it was the last time they were all together. I couldn't have known it at the time but it was something special. I've seen a lot of groups fight - and fight well - but I've never seen anything like it before or since. Groups consist of adventurers who are, on average, undisciplined. While the Dragons had the attention span of a goldfish, it is amazing how razor sharp they became when hunting.

We had been hearing all day that an evil army of the dead was on its way to slaughter the inhabitants. Rumors, messengers, soldiers who had deserted all brought rumor of the impending invasion. Many of the people who lived there got freaked out. Others left the market day - completely. The town was terrified, the dragons...curious.

At last, night fell over the town. A large fog rolled up. Not magically created mind you but natural - and spooky as heck. The fog was a good ten foot deep and rolled up like a wall of water. It crashed over the town like a wave and left us under the thick white mist like sea froth. Visibility was down ten feet most spots with a few thicker areas.

The inhabitants of the town cowered under the feeble gold glow of the lights of the tavern or made their circles and wards ready in fear of what the night would bring. The dragons stood on the porch of the inn with the others. One towns person decided to go into the fog to scout out the situation. When he did not return, another went out to look for him. When he also failed to return, another individual wanted to go out. The dragons attempted to convince him not to go out, citing that perhaps the others who had gone out alone had not done well. Failed to sway him. He, too, was gone into the fog. After a brief discussion, the dragons agreed that intelligence was a good survival skill for adventurers and that one probably wouldn't survive.

A few microseconds later, the Dragons had grown restless. "Let's hunt," Tempest announced. The Dragons then formed into a square around yours

truly with no word to one another. I began to wonder if they had developed some sort of hive mind as I'd never seen them practice this move. We moved out and were swallowed up by the wet fog.

Suddenly, a shadowy figure!

Squitt!!!

The dragons closely examined the figure. It seemed to be a towns person. After healing them up and pushing them in the direction of the inn, they headed on.

Another figure!

Squitt!!!

Undead.

Another!

Squitt!!!

There weren't that many but it seemed that anything that got close to the Dragon Cube™ got dead fast enough that they'd slide if they were running.

The Dragons began to grumble that for an undead army they sure didn't seem to have a lot of troops.

We found a lady out in the mist who began to cast an offensive spell at the Dragons. Heck, she might have even been able to cast it before the Dragons reached her, jogging still in a cube formation. She managed to imprison herself just before they reached her. The Dragons decided to keep her. They wanted to make sure that she was indeed the head of the evil army rather than some berserked or stupid towns person.

In most situations, the party strings out as they walk along. The person at the rear of the formation gets stuck pushing the imprisoned person. The entire party forgets that if the person who is imprisoned is the one who cast it they can drop it at will. This usually lets the imprisoned person escape, possibly stealing the person who was previously pushing them.

It didn't work that way with the dragons. Your humble narrator got to push the lady to the tavern while the Dragon Cube™ continued to surround her, ready for her to drop the imprison and take a merciless beating.

After questioning the locals and finding out that this was indeed the lady that needed a killing, she was placed onto her face and dispelled. She didn't quite make it to her feet before taking enough damage to kill the last three villains to threaten the town.

Looking back to that distant night makes me sad. Although I am lucky enough to still see one of the dragons (Blizzard), that moment of teamwork, dedication and competence will always stand in my mind as what can happen when competent people work together for a long time.

The end of the Great Pack came eventually. Though it is argued that this is not what caused the break up of the Great Pack, I believe it is. One of the main things Dragons do is to build up a horde. The Great Pack built up a horde that was so impressive, so overwhelming that they would literally charge people to see it. Everyone who saw it was very impressed and felt they got their money's worth. One day, the dragons had gotten sloppy and had some useless girl in their circle casting a ritual. She interrupted her own ritual to check on someone's condition and backlashed the ritual. Every item in the circle - be it celestial or earth - was DFM'ed then blown up. This, in my mind, marks the end of the Great Pack. To have been brought low by such a one as that was truly a sad state of affairs.

In the wake of the Great Pack, several lesser versions have sprung up. There are precious few dragons actually around but many Drakes.

The Promise

I noticed on my travels with the Dragons that any time I would cast chaos, blackness would overwhelm me. Later, concerned Dragons would heal me and ask me if I was OK. I never did understand why this was happening. Later, Tempest related his concerns that his friend Jinn (a treeant) was out in the woods. Any casting of chaos with him out there could hurt him. He made me promise not to cast chaos within sight of any trees on Tyrna. I promised him and actually kept the promise for several years.

In the meantime, I began to hire lumberjacks for a huge deforestation program of Tyrna. Little did I realize that several dwarves had already come up with something very similar called the Master Plan.

Later, I met Jinn and made a deal with him. He promised that he would notify me before coming into an area so I was free to cast chaos as I needed. It was a good deal, a fair deal so he took it.

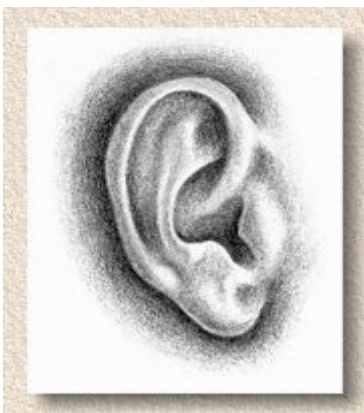


The Sneeze

Whilst I was in Caladore at their tavern I did chance to sneeze. Out popped a fully grown person! "Get him!" roared the dragons and took off after the swift individual. After that person was hunted down and killed, it was determined that I had too many spirits in me. A party of adventures was recruited to enter my nose and go collect rent from the reasonable spirits and kill off the less reasonable ones. I recall a piece of treasure they got was a very large green booger, capable of life-ing someone twice a day for a year. I bring this up because it is an example of the kind of crap that happens to me *all of the time*.



A few years later in a town near Yaros, adventurers went into my ear to collect still more rents and fight off infections within my body. Unfortunately, a person (who permanently died that very same event) was annoyed beat me from within. I was completely incapacitated on the adventure I had foolishly been trying to do at the same time.



Dragon Poker

Everyone has to find a niche. Some do, some don't. Some find several niches. Those that don't find a niche generally fade into obscurity or struggle along wondering why they are always overlooked. Some find niches and become famous for them. One adventurer who comes to mind as someone who found a niche was Analyse. It was said that if you wanted to know anything about anyone, she would know. Some people find more than one niche. One of my other niches is Dragon Poker. For rules on how the game is played and what the dragon poker Guild Rules are, see my book "Keeping Your Skeletons Their Whitest - A Beginners Guide to Necromancy". If you don't have a niche, I'd highly recommend figuring one out.

My philosophy on Dragon Poker:

Dragon Poker requires a balance of three things; luck, common sense and wealth. If one of those gets out of whack, things get interesting. I like Dragon Poker because it generates a wide variety of emotions - greed, love, hate, fear - they're all there. It's a neat way to get together with friends and do something different from combat. People who say "I gamble with my life but never my money" are merely displaying a different type of cowardice in my opinion. Those people are often told, in the words of the bard, to "Shut up and put your money where your mouth is".

What Dragon Poker does for the tavern and the town:

In towns that are not especially poor, nor where the lords of the land have too harsh of control, it is common place for me to put up a circle within the tavern that we may gamble in. Usually everyone in town is invited into that circle when it is raised. This creates a nice hard point within the tavern.

My opinion of other gambling games:

Recently, I've been hearing a lot about Badderian Hold 'em. People talk about how it is as good (or better!) than Dragon Poker, etc. I have yet to actually witness a game of this being played! (Note: I

am sure some way upon reading this will rush to have a game in progress when I wander past but at the time of this writing it is true.) This tells me that the people who play this game have all of the enthusiasm of a zombie! Nearly every market day I am able to get a game of Dragon Poker going but never do I see this Badderian Hold 'em. What does that tell me?



Military Excursions into FA

While I was on vacation in Caladore, several excellent adventurers were chosen to fight on the side of FA. I remember Puck and the great Western Shield, Shriloka the crazy elf (retired), Morgosh (now a lich) and I think one or two others I can't recall. We all got rifted to the Desert Sands of Mar-Ming to fight an incursion of Ssartss and Liches. The Ssarts are a barbaric people who resemble snake scavengers or lizard men. They swing hard enough that their venom usually affects the target on the first hit. The Liches who allied themselves with them were obviously outcasts from FA. They were powerful enough that they could have perhaps served the Council directly. There were six or eight of us. As we looked at the horizon where they stood, 30 or 40 across we knew we would be in for an amazingly tough fight.

They began chanting and beating their weapons against their shields. I saw one of our number physically shaking from the fear, like a leaf in a strong wind. But nobody backed off. Nobody ran. Boy, were we stupid.

It was a hard fought battle. I remember being in someone's imprison (good guy or bad guy) most of the battle. Usually, I was lying on my face, waiting for the killing blow that never came. It was a crazy battle. It was a good half hour or hour of constant fighting, chasing then fighting some more.

I recall seeing one of the Western Shield guys surrounded by Ssartss and Puck yelling "Pull back!" The guy ignored Puck. Puck called him by name and ordered him to pull back. The guy ignored Puck. Puck yelled "Hey, Asshole! Pull back!" Sadly, it was too late, the guy crumbled.

That was rough.

Long story short, we took no prisoners but the guy permanently died. It was a costly victory. Those who were there will forever remember the ice in their bones, their hair standing up and their bodies drenched with sweat. I hope to never have to do that again, Chaos willing.

The Loosing of the Squid

I get asked a lot about the squid. Bright red, vaguely phallic shaped, hanging off of my belt... Glowing eyes... Malevolent presence... Evil... Vampiric...

For some odd reason, it tends to bring up questions.

Back before I came to Tyrna, it was decided to affix the Squid to me via a spell of True Ownership. This is a fairly rare, very expensive FA King spell that causes the squid to work its way back to me if separated no matter what. In time, the squid will work its way back to me. They then bound it to me with a rather flimsy, old and dirty string that they told me was magic somehow. Well, that's what they told me anyway.

Obviously, I didn't volunteer for this assignment.

After a sufficient whining, I did get help - the Penguin. He was made belt sized so that I could carry him around with the squid.

A certain amount of willpower is needed to keep the squid in check. The penguin was suppose to fill in the gaps of my concentration, when I forgot about the squid or any lapses at all.

In other words, the penguin was basically doing all of the work.

I forget how the squid got loose near Caladore, but perhaps that is for the best. Suffice it to say that it managed to get off of the FA King Magic String that held it in check.

The squid was gone for an entire year. At first, I tried to get bands of new adventurers to go out and hunt for the squid. The couple half hearted attempts done were met with failure. After half of a year, when a moderately experienced group of adventurers attempted to capture a then man sized squid it escaped because one of the adventurers was apparently inexperienced with how an imprison worked.

But not a lot of interest was paid to the Evil Vampiric Squid of Death (whom I call 'Squidy') being loose until a year had gone by. Peasants began coming into town with sucker marks on their face, barns were knocked over by the huge squid and people chased off. Now that it had become a huge problem, the adventurers decided to act.

I wandered in after they had been fighting Squidy for a bit. The Squid seemed to be holding off the most powerful town of adventurers pretty well. The squid was a bit larger than nine people put together. It was doing some voice radius death spells, turning people into goo, etc. It even transformed one adventurer into a liche. He said his own family was forced to kill him but I heard that another adventurer who didn't like him did it.

I think that the squid might have eventually won against Caladore but I told the adventurers the trick to defeating him. After a very hard fought fifteen more minutes, they finally managed to take down the squid. They managed to get it tied to my belt in record time. It was then that it was noticed the Penguin was gone.

It just so happened that a powerful adventurer named Ember had been messing about with the penguin for the last couple years. Trying to killing blow him, hitting him on the head with his sword as he would walk by, taunting him, etc. Finally, the penguin had gotten fed up.

He had gone off to train.

We got rumored reports of a penguin using a large fish tied to a tree as a punching bag. Ember wasn't worried. He was certain he could take on a flightless arctic aquatic fowl.

Several years later, Ember was in the land of Grey (something or other) and talking to their nobility. The nobility was attempting to get Ember and another adventurer named Alexander to retire. He was telling them that they had killed all of their foes and they could now pick up the plow

in peace. Ember and Alexander were saying that wouldn't work - things would find them and try to kill them. "You don't know what we've had to take on!" they cried. "Oh" says the duke, "I've had my share of adventuring and..."

At that moment a couple hundred pounds of angry black and white penguin kicked in the door and called Ember out.

Apparently, after that, the Duke didn't have a lot to say. I guess it's one way to prove a point.

To those faithful readers that are wondering - Ember won, but he had to use three of his dodges to do so.

The penguin is still sulky.



Slaves in Kilbar

One day, there were some people sitting around protesting. They appeared to be peasants from the area. After they had protested in a lackluster sort of way for a very long time I said something to the effect of:

"It sure would be a pity if they was to all drop unconscious."

And they did. I'm sure it could have nothing to do with the grinning adventurers that were standing behind them. So, I began taking four of them to FA. Slavery is illegal in Kilbar and I make it a point to obey the laws of the land I am in so I gave the unconscious people a free one way vacation to FA. Want to be a good upstanding citizen I do.

Later, the matter got brought to the attention of Lord Grey. He was very grave about it and informed me that taking slaves was illegal as well in Kilbar. I was shocked. Ignorance of the law is no excuse so I paid my 2 gold fine to him on the spot. Sadly, he won't let me prepay further fines.

Next market day, Lord Phelix (another lord of the town) pops up and is all upset.

"What's wrong! What's wrong!" I cry.

He goes on about slaves and his townspeople disappearing.

I tell him not to worry, I've already paid my fine to Lord Grey.

He then asks me where the people are.

"Well, on FA, farming the fields - why?"

And he gets all upset again.

I suspect that the other stresses of the job were getting to him. He starts telling me that I have to get them back here. I object that I've paid my fine. "Best two gold I ever spent!" I tell him. But he's having none of it.

So I go back to FA.

I go to the WhipMaster and ask him about the people I'd brought him. He shows me that (as per procedure) they'd been made into zombies and forced to tend the fields. I tell them I need the four I brought him. He looks all disappointed. "There's no helping it," I tell him.

I take the four zombies back to Kilbar.

But, I want to be an upstanding citizen. Undead are illegal in Kilbar.

So, I turn them in to a guard shack on the way back. As far as I know, they're still there farming away at the bottom of the cell. I'd heard that the guards let them out for a bit of R & R on an ongoing basis. I hear the guards are growing some beautiful tomato plants as well.

So, a couple months later, I'm relating this amusing little anecdote to the Ducal Knight of Kilbar and he thanks me for turning dangerous undead into the guard shack.

He even gave me a 2 gold reward.

The Trials and Tribulations of Lumsie

Are you now or have you ever been a necromancer?

It is odd but recently, I have been put on trial twice for necromancy. It is not that I am surprised about being called a necromancer but that I have actually been brought to trial that surprises me. I was put on trial once up north (somewhere East of the Kingdom of Malem) and once in Varos. In Varos, their wise King had set up many good laws that I completely agree with but hadn't said anything about necromancy. A Countess, believing it was 'right' continued on some outdated laws that had been found moldering in an older Varos. It makes me sad not to live in a more civilized area but perhaps we can bring understanding to the ignorant.

What Lumsie has been up to lately:

I've been journeying around with my new best friend, a spooky spider scavenger who apparently has been feeding on Lumsie nightly. This would explain the morning wooziness and memories of childhood.

Lumsie's opinion of the different races:

Barbarian:

Great Fighters but I see no reason why they shouldn't be humans.

Byata:

Tasty - see my book "Keeping Your Skeletons Their Whitest, A Beginners Guide To Necromancy" for details.

Dragon:

Outside of the Great Pack, they are rare. The dragon at rest is among the most flighty, easily bored creatures out there. When focused, among the most dangerous. Note this is different from the 'drake' who is usually either a developing adventurer (rare), a wannabe (common) or a sped (very common).

Dwarves:

I've never met a dwarf that I didn't like. Mind you, I don't like eating them. They are tough, stringy and taste of dirt. Almost all of them make useful things I like. Most of them are into chaos. Great folks.

E)yes:

It is my belief that the ears dig into the brain causing insanity. Not the good entertaining kind but the kind that makes you want to hold your head and shout at them to shut up and go away.

Human:

They have the curse of being average.

Hobbling:

There are two kinds of hobblings that I have found. The first is the rare true hobbling is stout of gut and has a love of all things edible. A good example of this is my friend Oleander Sven Anderson. These are rare. The second is the hobbling of convenience. These are much more common. They like to be able to resist toxins and can be extremely war like upon other towns members.

Ogre/Orc/Goblin/Kobold

There are good examples of these (like Crock) but the majority are just annoying things I can't eat.

Scavenger:

Widely diverse. Spider scavengers are especially annoying as I have come to believe that they feed on my blood while I'm asleep.

Appendix I

FA King Facts and Figures

Borders: Desert of Ha-Minge, home of the Ssantss.

Coastline: Sea of Tears

Climate: Moderate during the winter, very hot during the summer.
Little rainfall.

Terrain: Desert, mountains

Natural resources: Magic, cursed treasure

Natural hazards: Uncontrolled undead, earth quakes, magical traps from eras past.

Population: Two million in the capital city. There are approximately one undead per three living people, counting zombie workers.

Government:

Ruled by the FA King

The FA King is advised by the Council of Liches (AXA 'The Council' for short)

Those in line to the throne may or may not be given official duties, dependant upon the wishes of the FA King.

Exports:

Magic items & scrolls

Imports:

Slaves, food, luxury items, copper

Interesting customs:

Gladiatorial games.

Appendix 2

Strung up in a Web

To the tune of: Stuck in the middle with you

Well I don't know why I came here tonight,
I got the feeling that something ain't right,
I'm so scared in case I fall off my chair,
And I'm wondering how I'll get out this web,
Spiders to the left of me,
Spiders to the right, here I am,
Stuck in a big ole web.

Yes I'm strung up in a web,
And I need a release potion real bad,
It's so hard to keep this smile from my face,
Losing control, yeah, I'm all over the place,
Spiders to the left of me, Spiders to the right,
Here I am, Stuck in a big ole web.

I saw this cabin here and thought,
This would be a good place to stay,
And the spiders, they all come crawlin',
Poison you, web you and say,
Food.... Food.....

Trying to make some sense of it all,
But I can see that it makes no sense at all,
Is it cool to go to sleep in the web,
'Cause I don't think that I can make it to bed
Spiders to the left of me, Spiders to the right,
Here I am, Stuck in a big ole web.

I saw this cabin here and thought,
This would be a good place to stay,
And the spiders, they all come crawlin',

Poison you, web you and say,
Food.... Food.....

Well I don't know why I came here tonight,
I got the feeling that something ain't right,
I'm so scared in case I fall off my chair,
And I'm wondering how I'll get out this web,
Spiders to the left of me,
Spiders to the right, here I am,
Stuck in a big ole web.